

## OLD CHURCH SLAVONIC: NUMBERS, DATES, AND MONTHS - Matthew Bialawa

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For the genealogist researching records from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and earlier in the areas of modern day Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, familiarity with some features of Old Church Slavonic (OCS) and Church Slavonic is important. Old Church Slavonic and Church Slavonic can be found in both Orthodox and Greek Catholic (Uniate) records. Of course, one need not master the complex grammar to understand these documents. However, a brief introduction to some basic points of the languages can be useful.

Old Church Slavonic was a separate and unique Slavonic language reserved for the written document. It was the language of manuscripts and early church writings used first by early South Slavonic scholars and monks. It was later brought north to Ukraine and Russia by Christian missionaries in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is not, as sometimes commonly thought, the predecessor to Russian, Ukrainian, or any other Slavonic language. Old Church Slavonic did not turn into another language over a period of time. Moreover, it was not used in everyday speech by either the common people or educated scholars. Old Church Slavonic was used solely as a literary language in place of the vernacular language which did not yet have a written form. It did, however, influence the early Slavonic languages. Remnants of Old Church Slavonic can be found in Slavonic languages today.

Church Slavonic is the liturgical language of today's Ukrainian Catholic Rite and the Russian, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Czech, Bulgarian, and Serbian Orthodox churches.

### Number System used in Old Church Slavonic and Church Slavonic

Understanding the Cyrillic alphabet is not enough to be able to read parts of documents. Often, parish priests of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries wrote numbers and dates in the Byzantine tradition, that is, using the alphabetical letters in place of arabic numerals. This shouldn't seem strange for we are all familiar with Roman numerals. This is the same system of corresponding letters of the alphabet to numbers. In the Roman system, for example, the letter I is

equivalent to the number 1, the letter V to the number 5, the letter C to 100, and so on.

Old Church Slavonic, and later adopted by Church Slavonic, had a similar system with its own alphabet, though a little more complex. Many more letters of the Old Church Slavonic alphabet were

TABLE 1

### OLD CHURCH SLAVONIC ALPHABET

LETTER OF ALPHABET	NAME OF LETTER	SOUND EQUIVALENT	NUMERIC EQUIVALENT
а	аз	а	1
б	буки	б	—
в	веди	в	2
г	глаголь	г	3
д	добро	д	4
е	есть	е	5
ж	живете	ж	—
з	зело	з	6
и	земля	и	7
і	иже	и	8
к	и	и	10
л	како	к	20
м	люди	л	30
н	мыслете	м	40
о	наш	н	50
п	он	о	70
р	покой	п	80
с	рцы	р	100
т	слово	с	200
оу	твердо	т	300
ф	ук	у	400
х	ферт	ф	500
ѿ	хер	х	600
ѡ	от	о	800
ѣ	цы	ц	900
ѥ	червь	ч	90
Ѧ	ша	ш	—
ѧ	шта	шт (ш)	—
Ѩ	ер	близок к «о»	—
ѩ	еры	ы	—
Ѫ	ерь	близок к «е»	—
ѫ	ять	не (е)	—
ю	ю	ю	—
Ѭ	я	я	—
ѭ, Ѯ	юс малый	я	—
ѯ, Ѱ	ѣотованный	у	—
ѱ, Ѳ	юс большой	ю	—
ѳ	ѣотованный	ю	—
ѵ	кси	кс	60
Ѷ	пси	пс	700
ѷ	фита	ф	9
Ѹ	ижица	как «и» или «ю»	400

used for

Mensis	NOMEN	Catholica	Aecatholica	Puer	Puella	Illegitim	Legitimi	PARENS	MATER	NOMEN
Februar.										
	Свѣдѣніе									
	22.									
	Свѣдѣніе									
	29.									
	31.									
	102.									
	90.									
	37									

Figure 1 - Greek Catholic Birth Register page from the parish of Bialyy Kamin

numbers. Whereas the number 3 translates to Roman numeral III (I+I+I or 1+1+1), the Old Church Slavonic system had more unique equivalencies. Table 1 is the Old Church Slavonic alphabet with numeric equivalencies.

When the letter was used as a number, a *titlo* was written over and dots were written around the letter(s). Though this is the proper style, I have seen many documents without such diacritic marks.

The numbers 11-19 are written in the opposite order as we know them:

•І• (10)      •ѠІ• (11)      •ѠІІ• (12)  
•ѠІІ• (13)      •ѠІІІ• (14)

The numbers higher than 20 are treated in the usual order:

•Ѡ• (20)      •ѠѠ• (21)      •ѠѠѠ• (22)  
•ѠѠІ• (23)      •ѠѠІІ• (24)

Figure 1 shows examples of Old Church Slavonic numerals and Church Slavonic months. At the top of the page, the year is clearly written in both OCS and arabic numerals. In the first five records on the page, the dates are written in OCS numerals, but the house numbers are written in arabic numerals. The months are written in Church Slavonic. In the sixth record the priest uses arabic numerals for the dates and Latin letters for the name of the month. The dates of the first five records are February 3, March 11, April 10, May 30, and June 6.

In order to write years, a small mark (r) was placed under the first letter to denote 'thousand.'

•Ѡ І І Ч Ѡ• is the year 1999

### And the world began...

The Christian church believed at one time that the world began in the year 5508 BC. Therefore, scribes often dated their documents not based on the year of Christ's birth, but on the start of the Universe. So, do not be surprised to find such dates as:

•Ѡ З Р Ч Г• is the year 7193

Simply subtract that number from 5508 to get the year as we know it. So:

•Ѡ З Р Ч Г•  
- •Ѡ Ѡ Ѡ ІІ•  
•Ѡ І X ІІ Ѡ•

or if you stubbornly prefer the western way:

V M M C X C I I I  
- V D V I I I  
M D C L X X X V

OK, here you go:

7 1 9 3  
- 5 5 0 8  
1 6 8 5

Keep in mind that this system of dating the world at 5508 BC was still common in Russia up to the year 1700!

In studying records from my ancestral Greek Catholic parish of Bilyj Kamin in western Ukraine, I found a mixture of Old Church Slavonic, Ukrainian, Polish, and Latin. Fortunately, the priest used the simpler version of dating based on the year of Christ's birth. What follows are some examples from that parish.

The illustration below shows April 5. Notice the *titlo* over the number 5. This is standard OCS, although it is often omitted by the priest.

Апрѣла, 5ѣ: Ѡ

May 4 is shown below. Notice the year is written in arabic numerals and is followed by the Latin word 'anno' for 'year'.

Маѣ 4ѣ: Ѡ: 1727 Anno

In these examples, the second word 'dnja' in OCS means 'of the day', so literally 'of the 5<sup>th</sup> day of April' in the first example.

### Calendars

Now that we are talking about years, I should mention the two types of calendars that you can come across. Poland adopted the Gregorian calendar (the calendar we currently use today) in 1582. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was similarly using the Gregorian calendar when it seized Galicia in 1772. Russia, however, kept the old Julian calendar up until 1918, before converting to the Gregorian. Therefore, you must remember this fact when reading documents. You should be aware of the geography and changing borders of the regions you are researching.

Mensis	NOMEN	Catholica	Accatholica	Puer	Puella	Illegitimi	Legitimi	PARENS	MATER	NOMEN	CONI
1784											
1. 40	Александра Барсара ц.о. Зайко да,	1	"	"	1	"	1	Иванъ За- мишинъ, Солннхъ въ Евѣ Бурманъ.	Матвѣи Зайдманъ, ц.о. Займанъ.	Богданъ Миходанъ Андрасѣи ц.о. Мелнѣи.	Солн ц.о. Займанъ.
3. 96	Барсара ц.о. Зайко ц.о. Зайко,	1	"	"	1	"	1	Стефанъ Зайко Солннхъ,	Марина Зайко Зайко,	Паска Стефанъ Анна Зайко Зайко.	Солн Зайко Зайко.
11. 00	Анна ц.о. Макасеи. ц.о. Зайко,	1	"	"	1	"	1	Григорій Макасеи Макасеи-на ц.о. Макасеи.	Марина Зайко Зайко,	Григорій Макасеи Марина Зайко.	Солн Зайко Зайко.
	Рокъ Бѣи Андрѣи.										
1705.											
1. 40	Александра Марія ц.о. Зайко ц.о. Зайко,	1	"	"	1	"	1	Антонъ Зайко Зайко,	Марія Зайко Зайко,	Иванъ Зайко Зайко.	Солн Зайко Зайко.

Figure 2 - As in the examples in Figure 1, the dates are written in OCS numerals, whereas the house numbers are written in arabic numerals. The months are written in Church Slavonic.

- 1: December 3
- 2: December 6
- 3: December 14 (remember, the numbers 11-19 are written backwards.)
- 4: The year is clearly written in both OCS and arabic numerals
- 5: January 4

There is a 12 day gap between these two calendars. Often, both dates are written next to each other. The earlier date is in the Julian calendar and the later date is in the Gregorian calendar.

### Names of the months in Church Slavonic<sup>1</sup>

While we are discussing dates, I should discuss months in Church Slavonic. Readers of English with

a knowledge of the Cyrillic alphabet should have no trouble reading the months since they are so close to English and its Greek/Latin roots. Table 2 represents proper spelling. However, one can find slight derivations in the examples from Bilyy Kamin Greek Catholic records from the previous page. The priest from the parish often substituted Ukrainian spellings for Church Slavonic.

TABLE 2  
CHURCH SLAVONIC MONTHS OF THE YEAR

English	Church Slavonic Nominative Case (subject of the sentence)	Church Slavonic Genitive Case (with a date, as in the 1 <sup>st</sup> of January)
January	ІАННІАРІЇѦ	ІАННІАРІЇѦ
February	ФЕВРІАРІЇѦ	ФЕВРІАРІЇѦ
March	МАРТЪ	МАРТА
April	АПРІЛІЇѦ	АПРІЛІЇѦ
May	МАІЇѦ	МАІЇѦ
June	ІЮНІѦ	ІЮНІѦ
July	ІЮЛІѦ	ІЮЛІѦ
August	АВГУСТЪ	АВГУСТА
September	СЕНТЕМВРІЇѦ	СЕНТЕМВРІЇѦ
October	ОКТОБРІЇѦ	ОКТОБРІЇѦ
November	НОЕМВРІЇѦ	НОЕМВРІЇѦ
December	ДЕКЕМВРІЇѦ	ДЕКЕМВРІЇѦ

In all these cases:

Ѧ may appear as Ѧ

Ѧ may appear as Ѧ

Ѧ may appear as Ѧ

### Names of the Months in Old Church Slavonic and other archaic Slavic languages

While discussing the names of the months, I feel it necessary to include some terms which may be found in much older documents. I must forewarn the genealogist that such terms had most likely fallen out of use by the time priests began keeping records. Although I personally have only seen the months in either Church Slavonic (as in the chart above) or Latin in metryc books in the western Ukrainian villages I am researching, I can not assume that all record keepers followed suit.

I came across these numerous archaic terms when first researching the names of the months. What I thought would be a relatively easy task learning the months, I quickly found that each of the several dictionaries I consulted contained many different terms. I found that the examples given in some of these dictionary entries were from the earlier half of

this millenium. Therefore, I must stress that these terms are quite old. However, some of these terms might have found their way into early documents of interest to the genealogist.

The following table lists some variations of the months in older Slavonic languages, including Old Church Slavonic. It is not necessary to memorize the many terms, but only remember that this table exists for your use in the event you come across a month which you do not recognize or you have not found in the Church Slavonic chart above. Included in this chart below are archaic letters that are no longer used in any modern day Slavonic languages and an italic form, which closely resembles handwriting. I have included these two writing styles in order to offer examples of possible entries found in record books. Finally, I have included modern-day Ukrainian and Russian for an interesting comparison.

TABLE 3

VARIANTS OF MONTHS IN OLD CHURCH SLAVONIC, OLD SLAVONIC AND OLD RUSSIAN  
AS COMPARED TO ENGLISH, UKRAINIAN AND RUSSIAN (CYRILLIC AND LATIN TRANSLITERATION)

January	sichen' (Ukr. transl.)	січень (Ukr.)	yanvar' (Rus. transl.)	январь (Rus.)
просинец <sup>2</sup>	просинѣц <sup>3</sup>	генуарш <sup>34</sup>	генъварь <sup>3</sup>	генварь <sup>3</sup>
просинец	просинѣцъ	генуарѣ	генъварь	генварь
February	lyuty (Ukr. transl.)	лютий (Ukr.)	fevral' (Rus. transl.)	февраль (Rus.)
сечень <sup>4</sup>	сѣчень <sup>3</sup>	феврарь <sup>34</sup>	февруарь <sup>4</sup>	февларь <sup>3</sup>
сечень	сѣчень	феврарь	февроуарь	февларь
March	berezen' (Ukr. transl.)	березень (Ukr.)	mart (Rus. transl.)	март (Rus.)
сухай <sup>2</sup>	марпъ <sup>3</sup>	марѣтъ <sup>34</sup>		
соухи	мартъ	марѣтъ		
April	kviten' (Ukr. transl.)	квітень (Ukr.)	aprel' (Rus. transl.)	апрель (Rus.)
брезовор <sup>2</sup>	брѣзьнь <sup>3</sup>	березозолъ <sup>34</sup>	травень <sup>3</sup>	травень
брезовор	брѣзьнь	березозолъ		
May	traven' (Ukr. transl.)	травень (Ukr.)	may (Rus. transl.)	май (Rus.)
правень <sup>2</sup>	маш <sup>34</sup>	травень <sup>3</sup>	травень <sup>3</sup>	травень
травень	маш	травень		
June	chern' (Ukr. transl.)	червень (Ukr.)	iyun' (Rus. transl.)	июнь (Rus.)
изок <sup>2</sup>	изокъ <sup>3</sup>	июнш <sup>34</sup>		
изок	изокъ	июни		
July	lypen' (Ukr. transl.)	липень (Ukr.)	iyul' (Rus. transl.)	июль (Rus.)
червень <sup>2</sup>	чървень <sup>3</sup>	июль <sup>34</sup>	июлш <sup>34</sup>	июли
червень	чървень	июль	июли	июли

August зарев <sup>2</sup>	serpen' (Ukr. transl.) заревъ <sup>3</sup>	серпень <sup>4</sup> серпенъ <sup>4</sup>	серпень (Ukr.) серпен <sup>4</sup>	август (Rus. transl.) авъгустъ <sup>3</sup>	август (Rus.) августъ <sup>3</sup>
зарев	заревъ	серпень	серпен	августъ	августъ
September рюин <sup>2</sup>	veresen' (Ukr. transl.) рюинъ <sup>3</sup>	вересень <sup>4</sup> септлмбръ <sup>4</sup>	вересень (Ukr.) септлмбръ <sup>4</sup>	сентябрь (Rus. transl.) септлмбръ <sup>3</sup>	сентябрь (Rus.) сентябрь <sup>4</sup>
рюин	рюинъ	септлмбръ	септлмбръ	сентябрь	сентябрь
October листопад <sup>2</sup>	zhovten' (Ukr. transl.) листопадъ <sup>3</sup>	жовтень <sup>4</sup> октомершъ <sup>4</sup>	жовтень (Ukr.) октомершъ <sup>3</sup>	октябрь (Rus. transl.) октомеръ <sup>4</sup>	октябрь (Rus.) октябрь <sup>3</sup>
листопад	листопадъ	октомеръ	октомерин	октомеръ	октябрь
November грудень <sup>2</sup>	lystopad (Ukr. transl.) грудень <sup>4</sup>	листопадъ <sup>3</sup> грудень <sup>4</sup>	листопад (Ukr.) грудень <sup>3</sup>	ноябрь (Rus. transl.) ноябрь <sup>3</sup>	ноябрь (Rus.) ноябрь <sup>3</sup>
грудень	грудень	грудень	грудень	ноябрь	ноябрь
December стюденъ <sup>2</sup>	hruden' (Ukr. transl.) стюденъ <sup>3</sup>	грудень <sup>4</sup> декабрь <sup>3</sup>	грудень (Ukr.) грудень <sup>3</sup>	декабрь (Rus. transl.) декабрь <sup>3</sup>	декабрь (Rus.) декабрь <sup>3</sup>
стюденъ	стюденъ	декабрь	грудень	декабрь	декабрь

<sup>2</sup> Arvat, N.N. and Skiba, Yu.G. *Drevnerusskyy yazyk. Izdatel'skoe ob'edinenie "Vishcha shkola."* Kyiv, USSR: 1977.

<sup>3</sup> Sreznevskyy, I.I. *Materialy dlya slovarya drevnerusskogo yazyka. Tipografiya imperatorskoy akademii nauk.* St. Petersburg: 1903.

<sup>4</sup> Fasmer, Maks. *Etimologicheskyy slovar' russkogo yazyka.* Trans. from German by O.N. Trubachev. Progress. Moscow: 1986.

One should be careful when using this chart. You will notice that there are several cases where the same archaic term refers to different months. For example, the archaic term 'traven' could mean April or May. This is not an error. As the references indicate, different dictionaries list both April and May as possible meanings. Thus, if you should come across this in the older document, see if other months are listed. If you find 'may', then it would mean that the author is not using 'traven' for May, but April. Also, a mistake may be made by someone who understands modern-day Ukrainian or Polish. Such a person would naturally assume that the archaic term 'lystopad' would mean November since it so closely resembles modern-day Ukrainian ('lystopad') and Polish ('listopad'). A close look at this chart will show that each of the dictionaries I consulted translate this month not as November, but as October.

To summarize, one should only use this chart when studying very old documents when the above chart of Church Slavonic does not help or if you are certain that the text is not written in modern-day Ukrainian, Russian or Belorussian.

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Examples of Old Church Slavonic (OCS) numerals and Church Slavonic months. From Greek Catholic record books of Bilyy Kamin, Ukraine. §

Figure 3

- 1: 1739 of the month of February of the 1<sup>st</sup> day
- 2: 1739 of the month of February of the 14<sup>th</sup> day (note: the numbers 11-19 are written backwards in OCS numerals.)
- 3: 1739 of the month of February of the 29<sup>th</sup> day
- 4: 1739 of the month of May of the 19<sup>th</sup> day
- 5: 1739 of the month of August of the 3<sup>rd</sup> day

